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## Editorial

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**Biographical notes:** Gargi Banerji is a founding member of the NGO Pragya, which carries out research and development work in South-Asia and in Sub-Saharan Africa. Her career spans over two decades in research, development and consulting: a management post-graduate, she consults for the corporate sector, governments and development organisations; as Director of Pragya, a development organisation of repute with a diversified portfolio and internationally-recognised innovations, she guides its research, advocacy and programming. She is an advocate of the need for enhanced policy focus on ecologically-fragile regions and marginalised groups, and a proponent of a gender-empowering and community-based approach to development. For her contributions, she has been conferred with the Whitley Award for Conservation and the MSDS Award for Social Entrepreneurs.

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Women in agriculture suffer the same inequities, barriers and discriminations that they suffer in any other economic activity or sector. Yet, the damage from gender-exclusionary and gender-insensitive practices in agriculture are more significant and the impacts more far-reaching than in any other sector. For in agriculture, women constitute the maximum workforce and hence are key to the sector's productivity; they are also the world's main food producers, both in the farm and in the family, and hence the root for hunger-reduction and food security of populations. Yet they own no agricultural land; they lack access to agricultural inputs and technologies and markets; they are excluded from enablers of credit, training and extension services that could improve farm productivity and revenues; they are not permitted to make any decisions about their farms nor participate in shaping policies or programs that influence them as farmers and agricultural workers.

Although '*women hold up half the sky*' (Chinese proverb), they also constitute a disproportionately high number among the world's chronic poor – leading to the coinage of the term 'feminisation of poverty' – with a concentration in rural areas in developing countries, where agriculture serves as the major economic activity. While the agricultural sector underperforms because women in agriculture lack the resources and services which help to propel productivity increases, women's lower capacity is also a key factor to continuing poverty and hunger in households. Hence, empowering women in agriculture is not just vital from the development and human rights perspective, it is also 'smart economics' at the national and household levels.

Gender inequity in agriculture calls for understanding of the socio-cultural and even physical obstacles to women's equal participation in agriculture on the 'demand side', and recognition of the flaws, blocks and prejudices that characterise services and enablers for agriculture as well as related institutions and laws on the 'supply side', and a

commitment to address these via suitable science and governance actions. The collection of papers in this Special Issue on 'Gender, Governance and Agriculture' bring out the existing gender roles in agriculture and the inequalities, along with some good practices and recommendations for policy and practice, as well as identification of the areas that need further study. The mix of papers will take one across a range of contexts (from Cambodia to Zimbabwe), sub-sectors (cultivation, livestock, fisheries), and cross-cutting themes (support institutions, decision-making, water management, value-chains, nutrition & food security). Across all contexts however, gender inequity is uniformly evident, with some variations in nature and degree, although the gender-dynamics also appear to be changing, influenced by macro-changes with respect to gender-relations as well as agriculture.

Customary laws in most developing countries, steeped in patriarchal values, dictate distributional discrimination with respect to resources and almost wholly exclude women from land-ownership. Cultural mores also set a number of obstacles to equal and effective participation by women in agriculture. These include responsibility for (and disproportionately high time spent on) unpaid care work, restrictions on mobility and access to institutions, markets, etc., restrictions on social interaction or subordinate position for women in decisions with respect to land use, cropping, crop-marketing, etc. Besides, multi-dimensional gender inequality implies that women have lower food and nutritional security and thereby weaker health and physical capacity to meet the demanding requirements of agriculture, particularly since women are also cheated of gender-friendly technologies; the latter also means that they are relegated to the lower end of the hierarchy of labour in agriculture – of repetitive, manual activities such as sowing, weeding, etc.

A set of three surveys in Cambodia and Thailand, described by Walsh in this Special Issue, has brought out the gender-based division of labour and differences in decision-making in rural, rice-farming households, and also indicated the conditions in which women enjoy greater involvement in decision-making – in female-headed households, in households characterised by a consensual style, and for decisions requiring new information/innovation. Two other studies, one in Southeast Asia (Thailand) and the other in East Africa (Uganda), by Lebel et al. and Asaba respectively, have explored gender-dynamics in producer-organisations, with a focus on water management, and the influence it has on the quality of governance. They have found that women are major water-users but continue to be discriminated in access and remain under-represented in water management bodies, backed by gender stereotypes intrinsic to the women and in their families and patriarchal social constructs; they have also found however that the women who break the mould and participate and assert (as universally recognised, participation does not necessarily imply 'voice') in local water governance institutions, are more knowledgeable and altruistic in their roles and contribute to enhancing inclusiveness in water-sharing and resolving conflicts. In spite of this however, most agriculture development programs tend to neglect women or at best are gender-neutral. A series of case studies of agriculture development programs from across Zambia, Kenya and Egypt, presented by Farnworth et al., has examined women's roles in the fish and livestock production sectors and drawn out good gender-analysis or programmatic practices. It has revealed that while most agriculture development programs do lead to enhanced participation and incomes by women, they derive smaller and different benefits than men, who benefit from asset building and income-control. Gender-differentials in food production and nutrition have been brought out in a study in India by Ipe and Basu,

which indicates that women's dietary deficit and malnutrition is a condition resulting from gender-based social disadvantages as well as low agricultural productivity, though, ironically, women are the primary force for food-crop production and its conversion for the household; in turn this leads to inter-generational effects of malnutrition, a most tragic impact of chronic hunger.

Rural agricultural services perceive farmers as men only – although research highlights the increasing feminisation of the sector, which has implications for their gender-responsiveness. Most developing, agriculture-dominated countries are characterised by inefficient legal systems and poor implementation of gender-equitable laws and gender-responsive policies/programs at the grassroots. In conjunction with delivery systems that subscribe to traditional gender-values and social conditioning among women, this implies discrimination in provision of the complementary resources which could enhance women farmers' capacity, productivity and gains from agriculture, and has the effect of widening the gender-gap in the sector. Hence, women farmers lack education and information on agronomy and agricultural markets, suitable labour-saving and productivity-enhancing technologies, necessary infrastructure and services for reach to markets – and are trapped by the institutional structures to remain at subservient and subsistence levels in agriculture.

In this Special Issue, a study presented by Musiyiwa et al. has brought out gender-based differences in access to extension services by agriculture support institutions in Sub-Saharan Africa, across multiple agricultural sub-sectors. Women farmers' preference for services from NGOs in comparison to State agencies and local leadership points to the chauvinistic and gender-discriminatory attitudes prevailing in the State sector tasked with emancipation of agriculture as well as among the local leadership. Work by Gurung et al. in Nepal reveals gender-based constraints and exploitation in agricultural value-chains, but also demonstrates the gender-empowering potential of community-based enterprises for high-value agricultural products, backed up by gender-affirmative and pro-poor programming involving engagement of women producers in value-chains along with associated capacity-building, and creating an enabling environment for their equitable participation and promotion of women's leadership in the value-chain. These were found to have multiple developmental benefits including productivity and income increases, improvement in quality of life, particularly of women and children, and environmental sustainability. The studies also bring out the trends in gender dynamics in agriculture. While positive changes are revealed in gender norms as a consequence of urbanisation and income growth, there is a depressing deepening of poverty among women and gender-based violence, while the spreading capitalism in agriculture appear to be constraining both men and women's participation in decision-making.

There is a clear business case therefore for a thorough analysis of constraints and opportunities to gender equity in various agricultural value-chains towards enabling an effective effort to deal with the structural barriers to women's equal participation in agriculture. 'Demand-side' strategies that include sensitising both women and men, reaching into their families and all social spaces to overcome stereotypes, and building the agricultural capacity of women farmers and empowering them in producer organisations, would not only have the effect of transformative agricultural governance characterised by inclusive and democratic processes, but also bring about a productivity revolution in agriculture, with multiplier effects in terms of resource conservation as well as poverty reduction. Targeted interventions in and governance of women's nutrition is a critical independent focus area and would help in closing the gender-based productivity-

gap in agriculture and lifting generations out of hunger. On the 'supply side', gender-responsive programming in agriculture, adoption of affirmative policies, reform of public sector institutions, and multi-level accountability for emancipation of agricultural value-chains, along with stronger civil society participation, would be key to the reduction of gender-based asymmetries that are currently evident in the sector. They would also ensure that women's rights, as enshrined in the Convention for the Elimination of Discrimination against Women as well as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, are upheld in the agricultural sector, and propel holistic, equitable and sustainable development gains for the rural poor.